

NEW VACCINES SOON

PART OF A GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME TO REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

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Four new vaccines will be introduced in India as part of a government programme to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by next year and meet global polio eradication targets, PM Narendra Modi announced today.

With these new vaccines to be introduced as part of the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP), government will be providing free vaccines against 13 life threatening diseases to 27 million children annually, the largest birth cohort in the world. Vaccines against rotavirus, rubella and polio (injectable) will collectively expedite India's progress on

meeting the Millennium Development Goal 4 targets to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by the year 2015 and meet global polio eradication targets.

In addition, an adult vaccine against Japanese encephalitis will be introduced in districts with high levels of the disease. Along with the recent introduction of the pentavalent vaccine, this decision represents one of the most significant policy leaps in 30 years in public health, preventing at least one lakh infant deaths, deaths of adults in working age group and up to 10 lakh hospitalisations each year. "The introduction of four new life-saving vaccines will play a key role in reducing the childhood and infant mortality and morbid-

ity in the country," Mr Modi said. "Many of these vaccines are already available through private practitioners to those who can afford them. The government will now ensure that the benefits of vaccination reach all sections of the society, regardless of social and economic status," he said. "India is committed to tackle child mortality and provide health for all through multiple initiatives taken up by the government. Strengthening routine immunization is an essential investment in India's children and will ensure a healthy future of the country," Modi said.

Diarrhoea caused by rotavirus kills nearly 90,000 children each year, results in up

to 10 lakh hospitalizations, pushing many Indian families below the poverty line. It also imposes an economic burden of over Rs 300 crore each year to the country. India has developed and licensed its first indigenous rotavirus vaccine developed under a public-private partnership by the Ministry of Science and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. This vaccine will be introduced in a phased manner.

Tackling another major public health concern, the government of India's Universal Immunization Programme is set to introduce a vaccine against rubella which causes severe congenital defects in newborns, like blindness, deafness and heart defects.

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